# Unit 4 — Contemporary Poetry — Teacher copy

Track E · Klasse 13 · Niveau E (Basisfach / Leistungsfach) · Abitur year

**Niveau E**

## 1. Reading

Read the text and use it for the activities below.

**Reading — three poetic moves (paraphrased)**

*The fragmentary lyric* refuses syntactic completeness; lines break off mid-thought; the white space is part of the meaning.

*The document poem* uses found material — court transcripts, government documents, treaty texts — and re-arranges or annotates them; the *I* is ironised.

*The polyvocal lyric* allows multiple speakers / voices inside a single poem, often without quote marks; the boundary between speakers is deliberately uncertain.

**Vocabulary — contemporary poetic form**

*document poem (or documentary poetics), fragmentary lyric, prose poem, polyvocal lyric, found poem, ekphrastic poem, the broken line, the white space, polyphony, ironised I*, elliptical lyric.

## 2. Practise

**Niveau E — controlled**

1. Match: document poem → uses found material; polyvocal → multiple speakers; fragmentary lyric → broken syntax + white space.
2. T or F: contemporary lyric typically uses regular meter; document poems are usually sentimental.

**Niveau E — productive**

3. Build 3 sentences applying contemporary-poetic vocabulary to one of the three forms.

## 3. Your turn

**Poetic-analysis essay, 400 words.** Trace the *ironised I* across the three forms. Use 4 contemporary-poetic terms + 6 academic discourse markers + 1 cleft + 1 quote per poem.

**Sample**

*The most useful single move for reading contemporary lyric is the ironised I* — the speaker who refuses to claim the unified Romantic position and whose *I* is structurally compromised. In the fragmentary lyric, the *I* is interrupted by white space: a line breaks mid-thought, and the silence that

follows is part of the speaker. *"What I wanted to say / was — "* leaves the verb open. Accordingly, the speaker becomes a person interrupted, not a person speaking. By contrast, the document poem ironises the *I* by refusing it almost entirely: court transcripts, treaty texts, and government documents replace the lyric voice. *"The party of the first part hereby agrees — "* is, in Layli Long Soldier-style work, both a quote and a confrontation. The reader is forced to read the *I*'s absence as itself a poetic move. More specifically, the polyvocal lyric ironises the *I* by multiplying it: two or more voices share the poem without quote marks, and the boundary between speakers is the formal site of meaning. *"I said. She said. We said."* — the rhythm of pronoun shift performs the polyphony. It is precisely this shared refusal — fragmentary, document-based, or polyvocal — that distinguishes post-2000 lyric from its 19th-century inheritance. In this regard, what looks like formal experimentation is structural critique: the unified Romantic *I* is treated as one historical option among others, not as the natural form of lyric voice. Caution is warranted; not every fragmented line is a fragmentary lyric. The form is a stance, not a decoration. The reader's task is to register the stance and to ask, in each case, *what would the Romantic version of this poem have lost?*. The answer, more often than not, is precisely the thing the contemporary form is preserving.

## 4. Further reading / listening

- Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016).
- Warsan Shire, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022).
- Layli Long Soldier, *WHEREAS* (2017).

## 5. Teacher answer key

**Controlled.** 1. all true.

2. F (often free verse), F (often archival, ironic, or political — rarely sentimental).

**Productive.** 3. Open.